



**For immediate release  
December 3, 2007**

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## **GOV. PATRICK SIGNS BILL AIMED AT HELPING VOLUNTEERS AND FRIENDS GROUPS HOLD EVENTS IN THE STATE PARKS**

Governor Deval Patrick has signed a bill broadening the ability of the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to cosponsor events on DCR property with Friends groups and other volunteers. The bill now allows DCR, which oversees all state parks and beaches, to cosponsor volunteer fund-raising events, as long as the money raised is used to support and enhance DCR facilities and programs.

Having DCR as a cosponsor will reduce the liability of the Friends groups and other volunteers associated with the event. This will relieve the groups of the financial burden of obtaining their own liability insurance for their volunteers during those events.

In the past, Friends groups seeking to hold fund-raising and other events on the DCR properties they were looking to benefit were required to obtain a formal DCR permit, because DCR was prohibited by law from being a co-sponsor of a private group's fundraiser. In order to obtain these permits, Friends groups had to show they had liability insurance to cover risks associated with such events – possibly a costly requirement, especially for new or small Friends organizations, and an obstacle to civic engagement in support of state parks and beaches.

“This legislation is a huge acknowledgement of the value of the Friends groups and other volunteers in the programs, maintenance, and general well-being of the state parks,” said DCR Commissioner Richard K. Sullivan Jr. “We at DCR want to continue improving our partnerships with the Friends groups, and this new law will help us do that. We thank the governor and the legislators – especially Senator Bob Antonioni and Representative Jennifer Flanagan – who made this possible.”

Senator Robert A. Antonioni, who co-authored the legislation, said, “I think it was inadvertent, but the lack of policies and a formal relationship between these volunteers and DCR hindered the Friends from doing what they do best, which is encouraging people to get involved with the parks and their community. I am very grateful to Governor Patrick and Commissioner Sullivan for their support in making this a priority in their administration.”

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“Volunteer groups are the stewards of our state parks who work with the DCR staff to do events, programming, clean-ups, and a lot of great work,” said Representative Jennifer Flanagan, who championed the legislation in the House of Representatives. “This is the least we could do to help their efforts statewide.”

Emily Norton, president of the Friends of Willard Brook in Townsend, which had been active in lobbying for the legislation, also cheered the new law.

“The passing of the liability legislation is great news for Friends groups across the Commonwealth,” Norton said. “From now on, Friends groups can focus their energies on the business at hand: enriching the public’s enjoyment of the state parks and forests.”

Ed Murray, chairman of the Friends of Breakheart Reservation, said, “The Friends of Breakheart enjoy a great relationship with DCR, and the potential savings on insurance will allow us to direct those funds to improvements in the reservation.”

The act signed by the Governor has two key provisions that build on existing state and federal law to provide greater liability protection for volunteers and nonprofit organizations, while also ensuring the rights of innocent third parties to seek recourse in the case of injury or property damage as a result of the volunteer activities in the park.

The measure broadens the purposes for which DCR can cosponsor activities or events with nonprofit groups on DCR property to include those in which the nonprofit charges, solicits, or receives money. Also, while the new law no longer requires the nonprofit groups to purchase liability insurance for their volunteers at those events, it does require the groups to provide DCR with an annual accounting of the funds received and spent, to ensure that funds raised in the parks benefit the parks.

“Friends groups across the state thank those who have made this legislation possible,” said Norton, of the Friends of Willard Brook, “especially Senator Antonioni, Representative Flanagan, and Commissioner Sullivan.”

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*The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), an agency of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, oversees 450,000 acres of parks and forests, beaches, trails, roadways, and bridges. Led by Commissioner Richard K. Sullivan Jr., the agency’s mission is to protect, promote, and enhance our common wealth of natural, cultural, and recreational resources. To learn more about DCR, our facilities, and our programs, please visit [www.mass.gov/dcr](http://www.mass.gov/dcr). Contact us at [mass.parks@state.ma.us](mailto:mass.parks@state.ma.us).*